

The Million Dollar Mystery

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

Illustrated from Scenes in the Photo Drama of the Same Name by the Thanhouser Film Company

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CHAPTER XX.

Braine Tries Another Weapon.

"What I want now," said Braine, as he paced the living room of the apartment of the countess, "is revenge. I've been checkmated enough, Olga; they're playing with us."

"That is nothing new," she replied, shrugging. "At the beginning I warned you. I never liked this affair after the first two or three failures. But you would have your way. You wanted revenge at that early date; but I cannot see that you've gone forward. Has it ever occurred to you that the organization may be getting tired, too? They depend solely upon your invention, and each time your invention has resulted in touching nothing but zero."

"Thanks!"

"O, I'm not chiding you. I've failed, too."

"Are you turning against me?" he demanded bitterly.

"Do my actions point that way?" she countered. "No. But the more I view what has passed, the more disheartened I grow. It has been a series of blind alleys, and all we have succeeded in doing is knocking our heads. I can see now that all our failures are due to one mistake."

"And what the devil is that?" he asked, irritably.

"We were in too much of a hurry at the beginning. Hargrave prepared himself for quick action on your part."

"And if I had not acted quickly he would have started successfully on one of his world tours again, and that would have been the last of him, and we should never have learned of the girl's existence. So there's your argument."

"Perhaps you are right. But for all that we have not played the game with any degree of finesse."

"Bah!" Braine lit a cigarette and smoked nervously. "I can't even get rid of that meddling reporter. He has been as much to blame for our failures as either Jones or Hargrave. I admit that in his case I judged hastily. I believed him to be just an ordinary newspaper man, and he was clever enough to lull my suspicions. But I'm going to get him, Olga, even if I have to resort to ordinary gun-man tricks. If there's any final reckoning, by the Lord Harry, he shall get a chance in the witness stand."

"And I begin to think that that little bit of a girl has been hoodwinking me all along. By the way, did you find out what that letter said?" she asked after a pause.

"Letter? What letter?"

She sprang from her chair. "Do you mean to say that they have not told you about that?" Olga became greatly excited.

"Explain," he said.

"Why, I was at the garden day before yesterday, and a man approached and asked if I was Miss Hargrave. Becoming at once suspicious that something very important was about to happen, I signified that I was Miss Hargrave. The man slipped a paper into my hand and hurried off. I took a quick glance at it and was dumfounded to find it utterly blank of writing. At first I thought some joke had been played on me, then I chanced to remember the invisible ink letters you always wrote me. Understanding that you were to visit the cave in the morning, I had one man at the garden take the note. And you never got it!"

"Some one shall pay for this carelessness. I'll call up Vron and Jackson at once. Wait just a moment."

He went to the telephone. A low muttering conversation took place. Olga could hear little or none of it. When Braine put the receiver back on the hook his face was not pleasant to see.

"That girl!"

"What now?"

"It seems she had been out horse-back riding that morning. She had seen one of the boys cross the field and suddenly disappear; and she was curious to learn what had become of him. With her usual luck she stumbled on the method of opening the door of the cave and went in. She must have been nosing about. She didn't have much time, though, as the boys came up to await me. Evidently she crawled into that old chest and in some inexplicable manner purloined the letter from Jackson's pocket. They left to reconnoiter; and it was then that Jackson discovered his loss. When Florence heard them returning she jumped into the well. And lived through that tunnel! The devil is in it!"

"Or out of it, since we consider him our friend."

"And I had her in my hands, note and all!"

"But with all that water there will not be any writing left on the letter."

"Invisible ink is generally indelible and impervious to the action of water; at least the kind I use. I'd give a thousand for a sight of that letter."

"And it might be worth a million," Olga suggested.

"Not the least doubt of it in my mind. Olga, old girl, it does look as if my star was growing dim. We'll never get our hands on that million. I feel it in my bones. So let's settle down to a campaign of revenge, without any furbelows. I want to twist Hargrave's heart before the game winds up."

"You wish really to injure her?"

"I do not wish to injure her. Far from it," he replied, smiling evilly.

"You want her . . . dead?"

whispered Olga, paling.

"Exactly. I want her dead. And so if all my efforts here come to nothing, so shall Hargrave's. His millions will become waste paper to him. That's revenge. The Persian peach method."

"Poison? You shall not! You shall not kill her!" vehemently.

"Tender hearted?"

"No. If I must in the end go to prison, so be it; but I refuse to die in the chair."

"Very well, then. We shan't kill her, but we'll make her wish she was dead. I was only trying to see how far you would go. The basket of peaches is in the hallway. Every peach is poisoned. No man in the country knows more about subtle poisons than I do. Have I not written books on the subject?" ironically.

"And they will trace it back to you in a straight line," she warned. "I will not have it!"

"I can go elsewhere," he replied coldly.

"You would leave me?"

"The moment you cross my will," emphatically.

It became her turn to pace. Torn between her love of the man and the danger which stared her in the face,

she was for the time being distracted. All the time he watched her with malevolent curiosity, knowing that in the end she would concur with his evil plans.

"Very well," she said finally. "But listen; we shall be found out. Never doubt that. Your revenge will cost us both our lives. I feel it."

"Bah! The law will have no hand in my end. I always carry a pellet; and that ring of yours would suffice a regiment. She will not die. She will merely become a kind of paralytic; the kind that can move a little but not enough; always wheeled about in a chair. I'll bring in the peaches; rosy and downy. One bite, after a given time, will do the trick. If they suspect and throw them out we have lost nothing but the peaches. A trusted messenger will carry them to the Hargrave house. And then we'll sit down and wait."

Meantime, in the library of the Hargrave house, Florence and Jim were puzzling over the blank sheet of paper.

"I'll wager," said Jim, "the water washed all the writing away. The fire does not seem to do any good. We'll turn it over to Jones. Jones'll find a way to solve it. Trust him."

"What are you two chattering about?" asked Susan, who was arranging some flowers on the table.

"Secrets," said Jim, smiling.

"Humph!"

Susan pattered about for a few minutes longer, then crossed to the reception room, intending to go upstairs. At that moment the maid was admitting a messenger with a basket of fruit.

"For Miss Hargrave," said he. He gave the basket to the maid, touched his cap awkwardly, and swung on his heel, closing the door behind him. He was in a hurry to deliver another message.

"O, what lovely fruit!" cried Susan, pausing. "I'm going to steal one."

When the ambulance took the tor-

she laughed. She selected a peach and began eating it on the way up to her room.

The maid passed on into the library. "What's this?" inquired Florence, as the maid held out the basket. She selected a peach and was about to set her white teeth into it when Jim interposed.

"Wait a moment, dear," Florence lowered the peach. Jim turned to the maid. "Who sent it?"

"I don't know, sir. A messenger brought it, saying it was for Miss Hargrave."

"Let me see if there is a card." But Jim searched in vain for the card of the donor. At once all his suspicions arose. "Don't touch them. Better let the maid throw them out. Fruit from unknown persons might not be the healthiest thing in the world."

"What do you think?"

"That in all probability they are poisoned. But there's no need trying to prove my theory right or wrong. Ask Jones. He'll tell you to throw them away."

"Horrible!" Florence shuddered. "But they do not want to poison me. I'm too valuable. They want me alive."

"Who can say?" returned Jim gloomily. "They may have learned that they cannot beat us, no matter what card they turn up. I may be wrong, but take my advice and throw them away. . . . Good Lord, what's that?" startled.

"Some one cried!"

"O, Miss Florence!" exclaimed the maid, terror stricken as she recalled Susan's act. "Miss Susan took a peach from the basket and was eating it on the way to her room!"

"Good heavens!" gasped Jim. "I was right. The fruit was poisoned."

Jim had head enough to send for a specialist he knew. The specialist arrived about twenty minutes after Susan's first cry. To his keen eye it looked like a certain poison which had for its basis the venom of the cobra.

"Will she live?"

"O, yes. But she'll be a wreck for some months. Send her to the hospital where I can visit her frequently. And I'll take that peach along for analysis. No police affair?"

"No. We dare not call them in," said Jim.

"That's your affair. I'll send down the ambulance. Keep her quiet. She'll have a species of paralysis; but that'll work off under the treatment. A strange business."

"So it is," agreed Jim grimly.

Florence knelt beside her friend's bed and cried softly.

"You called me just in time. An hour later, nothing would have saved her. She would have been paralyzed for life."

Jim accompanied the doctor to the door and went in search of Jones. He found the taciturn butler eying the fruit basket, his face gray and drawn, though his eyes blazed with fury.

"Poison!"

"A pretty bad poison, too," said Jim. "We can't do anything. We've just got to sit still. But in the end we'll get them. That she devil . . ."

"No, my friend; that she devil. The woman is mad over him and would commit any crime at his bidding. But this is his work. We want him. He wasn't without courage to send this fruit, knowing that I would instantly suspect the sender. Yet, I have no definite proof. I could not hold him in court in law. He will have bought the fruit piece by piece, the basket in a basket shop. He will have injected the poison himself when alone. Poor Susan! That messenger was without doubt some one over whom he holds the threat of the death chair. That's the way he works."

Jim tramped the room while Jones carried the fruit to the kitchen. The butler returned after a while.

"What about that blank sheet of paper?"

"It has to be dipped into a solution; after that you can read it by heating. I have already dipped it into the solution. The moment the heat leaves the sheet the writing disappears again. The ink is waterproof. I'll show you."

Jones got a candle from the mantle, lit it, and held the sheet of paper very close to the flame. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, letters began to form on the blank sheet. At length the message was complete.

"Dear Hargrave—The Russian minister of police is at the Blank hotel under the name of Henri Servan. He is investigating the work of the Black Hundred in this country and can free you from their vengeance if you supply the evidence needed."

"Now, what evidence can he want?" asked Jim.

"Such as will prove Braine an undesirable citizen."

"And then?"

"Quietly pack him off to Russia, where he is badly wanted."

"Who sent this message?"

"One of our mysterious friends. We have a few, as you already know. But I'll go and make this man Servan a visit. I have seen the real minister, and if this man is the same one, something of importance may turn up. I shall want you somewhere about here. I'll let you have this letter. Remember, heat brings it out and cold makes it vanish. Now I'll go up for a moment to see how that poor girl is getting along. We are lucky; there's no ginsaying that."

"You're a clever man, Jones," said Jim.

Jones turned upon him, his face grave. The two men looked steadily into each other's eyes. Jones was first to turn aside his glance, as he had something to conceal and Jim had nothing.

When the ambulance took the tor-

tured Susan away, Jones addressed Florence gravely.

"I am going out and so is Mr. Norton. Do not leave the house; not even if you have a telephone call from me or Norton. Both of us will return; so don't let anything bother or confuse you."

"I promise," said Florence, struggling with a sob.

Jones went downstairs again, paused by a window as if cogitating, and suddenly threw it up and looked abroad. A rustle among the lilacs caused a smile to flit across his face. So they had sent some one to learn the effect of the poison? Or to follow him should he leave the house? He retired to the kitchen and gave some explicit orders to the chef, orders which did not in any way refer to

where he is is the woman. Vrona will be the most difficult."

"After dinner, then, since you know some of his haunts. There is a reward."

Jones laughed shortly. "Keep it yourself, sir. Mr. Hargrave would willingly double whatever this reward is to eliminate these despicable creatures from his affairs."

"Thanks."

While this conversation was taking place Norton idled about; and feeling the cravings for a cigarette, prepared to roll one, only to find that he hadn't the "makings." So fate urged him to step into the nearest tobacconist's.

He asked for his favorite brand and passed over the silver.

Braine and his companions saw Norton enter the shop. It agreed with their plans perfectly. The tobacconist happened to be afflicted with the order. So they hurried into the shop. Jim instantly realized that he was in a trap.

"How can I get out of here?" he whispered to the tobacconist.

The latter smiled. "I have to obey these gentlemen. I don't know what they want you for; but if I made a move to help you I should find my own throat cut without saving yours."

"The devil!"

Jim made a dash for the rear door, to find it locked. Even as he fumbled with the key, Braine and his companions flung themselves upon the reporter and overpowered him.

"Ah, my friend Braine!" he said.

"My friend Norton!" jeered the victor.

"And what do you want; some peaches?"

"A paper, my friend, a little secret of paper with invisible writing on it. We promise to give you something in exchange for it."

"What?" asked Jim with as much nonchalance as he could assume.

"Life."

"Search," said Jim. "You won't object to my smoking?" He began to roll a cigarette while they passed over him. He struck a match; the pleasant aroma of tobacco floated about his head.

"He's got it on him somehow. I saw him take it. He's got his nerve with him."

The cigarette glowed. Jim smoked hurriedly.

Through every pocket they went. The contents of his wallet lay scattered at his feet; his watch dangled from the chain. The cigarette grew shorter and shorter. Suddenly one of the men stretched out a hand and whisked the cigarette from Jim's lips.

Thus, while only one man followed Jones, several kept a far eye on Jim. Jones scribbled his name on a blank card and had it taken to the Russian's room. The page eyed that card curiously. It was different from anything he had ever seen before. In one corner were written three or four words which resembled a cross between Hebrew and Greek.

"Humph!" muttered the boy. "Whadda y' know about that? Chicken scratches; but I guess the bell rings Russian. On your way, Hargrave," he cried to the hall maid, who wanted a look at the card. "Up t' th' room, sir. He'll see yuh!" The boy kept the silver salver extended expectantly, but Jones went past without apparently noticing the hint.

The Russian was standing by a window when Jones knocked and was bidden to enter.

"You are not Hargrave."

"Neither are you the Russian minister of police," urbanely.

"Who are you?"

"I am Hargrave's confidential man, sir."

The two men eyed each other cautiously.

"You speak Russian?"

"No. I am able to scribble a few words; that is all."

The Russian lit a cigarette and smoked leisurely. He was in no hurry.

"No, I am not the minister; but I am his accredited agent. I am empowered to bring back to Russia a man who is known here by the name of Braine, another by the name of Vron, and a woman who calls herself a countess and unfortunately is one. All I desire is some damaging proof against them that they are outlaws in this country. The rest will be simple."

"They have all three taken out naturalization papers."

The Russian waved his hand airily. "Once they are in Russia those documents will never come to light. This man Braine, it has been learned, has long been in the pay of Prussia, and has given the general staff of that country many plans of our frontier fortifications. I do not know what any one of the three looks like. That is why I sought Hargrave."

"I will gladly point them out to you," said Jones, rubbing his hands together, a sign that he was greatly pleased.

"That will be very good of you, I'm sure," in a rumbling but perfectly intelligible English.

"And suddenly they all three will disappear!"

"Suddenly; and you may believe me that from that time on they'll be heard of never more."

"All this sounds extremely agreeable to me. Mr. Hargrave will be happy to hear that his long enforced hiding will soon come to an end."

"All you have to do, sir, is to point them out to me."

"It may take a week or ten days."

"My government has waited for ten years to gather in this delectable trio. A month, if you like."

"The sooner the better. I shall call this evening after dinner. We shall begin with Mr. Braine; and generally

stances without any mishap

He threw it to the floor and stamped out the coal.

"I thought so!" he exclaimed, holding out the scrap of burnt paper towards Braine.

The words "Dear Hargrave" were all that remained of the message. With a snarl of rage Braine whipped out his revolver.

"I will give you one minute to tell me what that paper contained."

"And after that minute is up?"

"A bullet in your stomach."

Quick as a flash Jim's hand shot out, caught the loosely held revolver, gave it a wrench, and brought it down savagely upon Braine's head. Then he reversed it and backed toward the front entrance.

"Au revoir, till we meet again, gentlemen!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Moved Pole and Wires.

Moving an electric-light pole, with its burden of wires, was the feat accomplished recently by a Cleveland illuminating company, which is regarded as novel from several standpoints.

In adding five feet to the width of St. Claire avenue it was decided to move the curb on each side of the street back two and one-half feet, but for part of the way the difficulty was increased by the presence of a pipe just inside of the curb. This was overcome by the use of an electric truck or three and one-half tons capacity supplied with a three-horsepower motor and winch, which is ordinarily used for drawing wires through the conduits.

This outfit was backed up to a distance of two and one-half feet from the curb and the pole secured by a chain near the ground. The pole and its load of wires then was raised and the truck backed to the curb and the pole lowered into its new location. This was done in many instances without any mishap.

True American Policy.

The country is theirs. The government is theirs. The liberty, if they can get it, and godspeed them in getting it, is theirs. And so as my influence goes while I am president nobody shall interfere with them.—President Wilson at Indianapolis.

There may be a better statement than this of the true American policy toward Mexico, but we do not remember having seen it.—New York World.

Unfair to Blame Tariff.

If the lessened treasury balance had resulted from increased imports the friends of the Underwood tariff would be put on the defensive. But there is no tariff theory ever framed that explains how to preserve a favorable trade balance when a nation's customers abroad are curtailing purchases by hundreds of millions in a single year. It is easy to call the war tax a "deficit tax." But to prove it you must first catch your deficit. We commend this primary necessity to our not overcareful contemporaries.

SOON TO BE NORMAL

Business Conditions Are Showing Steady Improvement.

Progress Being Made in Almost All Directions Is Noticeable—Better Times May Well Be Looked for Week by Week.

The improved business situation, and especially improvement in the steel industry as compared with conditions a few weeks ago, is cheering to the whole country.

A few prophets of good times were expecting the new era of prosperity to come with a rush, remarks the Birmingham (Ala.) Age-Herald. The more conservative and farseeing leaders of the business world, however, have been saying that there would be an improvement with the beginning of this year 1915, but that it was not reasonable to think there would be complete business recovery before the middle or the latter part of the year. Yet the steady progress that is now being made in many directions makes it safe to assume that in the industrial field at least, conditions will become normal by spring. Here in the Birmingham district industrial operations are probably 20 to 25 per cent nearer capacity than was the case two months ago.

In the speculative markets much depends on the government crop reports during the next few months. Last year's wheat crop was the largest ever produced in this country, but the acreage of winter wheat has been still further increased, and the probability is that a new high record will be reached in the next harvest. The South, weather conditions permitting, will raise larger crops of food products than ever before, and the limited cotton production will insure good prices for several million bales of the old crop left over. The grain market has been soaring. The stock market and the cotton market are upward in tendency and will continue upward until old time levels are approached.

This year has started out well, indeed, and as there is every promise that the business situation will improve week by week throughout the twelvemonth, the optimist may well revel in his rosiest prognostications.

Democratic Party and Business.

"My Republican friends are looking hopefully to 1916, but I think it a safe bet that the Democratic party will be continued in power," said Maurice Heckel, manufacturer, of Rochester, N. Y.

"The Republicans are trying to lay some of the blame for bad business last fall on the Democratic party, but that is not fair, and it will not work. This country was headed for prosperity when the European war broke out and gave the entire business world an awful shock. There was a sharp recession in American business, but we are gradually recovering from it, and by the spring prosperity will be felt in all parts of the country, as it is now in the West."

"We will have a great deal of prosperity between now and 1916, and the Republican calamity howler will then be making himself ridiculous if he tries to howl for party purposes."

Is Any Tax "Popular"?

In a recent editorial the Washington Post says that "the most unpopular and therefore the most unsatisfactory tax imposed by the government is that levied upon personal incomes." We should like to have the Post name one single tax that is "popular." Unless it can do so, we must conclude that the fact that the income tax is "unpopular" is no proof whatever that it is "unsatisfactory." Long ago Napoleon Bonaparte, a statesman of some slight intellectual capacity, said that the income tax was the best tax imaginable, since all people grumbled about it, which was the best possible proof that they paid it.

Prosperity Ahead.

Ample currency supplies, large foreign purchases, prosperity in the agricultural districts, increased purchasing power among three-fourths of the people of the United States is a guaranty of manufacturing activity and of larger and more profitable business to our merchants.

Throughout the Union the times will be better, and the dullness of trade locally will be a thing of the past by the opening of the new year.

True American Policy.

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